

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

REGULAR MEETING

Monday, November 8, 1999

Present: June Bailey, Joe McLeland, M.S. Mitchell, Leon Robinson

Absent: James Johnston, William Sanders and Andy Schlapp

Also Present: Blaise Plummer - Law Department; Tim Martz, Janice McKinney and Maryann Crockett (Staff)

President Mitchell called the meeting to order at approximately 3:30 p.m.

1. **Discussion regarding Feeding Homeless and Indigent People in Heritage and Naftzger Parks.** Acting Director Martz reviewed the item stating that he had been contacted by Police officers regarding churches feeding homeless people in Naftzger Park. He said the Police asked if the churches had permission to conduct this activity and if they had a permit. Martz said staff researched the files and couldn't find where any permits had been requested or issued for this activity. He said the Police suggested that perhaps Naftzger and Heritage Parks were not appropriate locations to feed large groups of people.

Martz said current Park Department policy is to provide an "Open Area Permit" for a fee of \$25.00 for four hours to groups to hold events where there is no specific open shelter, enclosed shelter or designated picnic area. He said the fee for events in downtown parks is \$30.00 per hour. He explained that downtown parks are popular places for weddings and other special events that require electricity, portable sound systems and additional trash pick up. He said by granting permits, the department has a point of contact if there is damage or litter left after an event. He said staff also notifies the Police Department when a permit is issued providing information on where and when an event is taking place. He said the minimal fees charged also help offset normal clean up and maintenance costs.

Martz requested that the Board provide recommendations on the issue of groups routinely feeding the homeless in parks.

President Mitchell asked the citizens present if they wished to address the Board. The following individuals spoke regarding the issue:

- **Rick Cline, Pastor, Central Church of Christ, 225 N. Waco, 265-9653** – stated that Central Church of Christ has been feeding the homeless in Naftzger Park every other Saturday from approximately 11:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. since June. He said their group has had a very positive experience with the homeless helping set up and clean up after each meal; however, he was not aware of what takes place at the park after they leave. He requested that they be allowed to continue this activity, working with Community Police, without paying a fee.

- **Darla Atchley, 607 S. Yale St, 652-7757** – said she and her husband, along with several other families, usually feed the homeless every other Saturday. She said they make sure there is no trash or food left at the park after each meal. Responding to a question, she said they usually feed between 40-50 individuals. She said sometimes they grill or bring in chili and sandwiches. She said the activity got started as a way to serve people who are less fortunate. She said she was told that a permit was not required for a “family picnic”. Staff clarified that a regularly scheduled “picnic” feeding 40-60 people would be considered an event and a permit would be required.
- **Steve Bermer, Pastor, Central Christian Church, 2900 N. Rock Rd., 688-4400** – said his group has been feeding the homeless at Naftzger Park one Saturday a month for about ten years. He said they usually grill hamburgers and hot dogs and feed anywhere between 40-60 people. He said their group feels they have been able to help some of the homeless people they have come in contact with.
- **Kyle Adams, General Manager, Spaghetti Warehouse, 264-7479** – commended the groups for their efforts at the park; however, he said two hours on a Saturday once or twice a month was not the same as spending every day and night, seven days a week, with some of the individuals who frequent the park. He said he has had to deal with people pan handling, checking doors of cars in the parking lot, digging through dumpsters, camping in the park, using the bathroom at Spaghetti Warehouse as a washroom and public restroom, etc. He suggested moving the activity to a better location such as a church in the downtown area. He mentioned a meeting of the Downtown Merchants Association on November 17 to discuss the situation with Police. He also mentioned that another group, who did not appear to be represented at the meeting, feeds the homeless at the park on Sunday. He concluded by adding that he had successfully employed one of the people who used to frequent the park.
- **Jennifer Ramsey, 4433 E. Mt. Vernon, 618-5321** – questioned the \$25.00 fee stating that she did not feel it would assist the downtown merchants problem or solve anything. She said the activity at the park involves more than just distributing food and that over a ten year period relationships have been formed with various individuals. She mentioned the need for more homeless shelters. She concluded by saying that the homeless would not come to the church to be fed.
- **Chris Westoff, Vineyard Christian Fellowship, 2020 E. Blake St., 263-8463** – said her group has been participating in the feeding program for approximately one year. She said she knows of five people who have been restored back to society as a result of the program. She said they would honor whatever the Board decided, as long as they could conduct the activity somewhere accessible, and asked if the Board could help them find another location.
- **Dena Badgett, 6412 E. 9th, 685-8506** – said she was concerned that the problem was not feeding the homeless, but trying to get rid of the evidence that there are homeless people in Wichita and that they are not wanted in the parks.
- **Craig Westoff, Vineyard Christian Fellowship, 2020 E. Blake St., 263-8463** – requested that the City give them a building.

Acting Director Martz said Police contacted him and requested park staff’s assistance to prune trees and remove shrubs and other landscaping features that they felt were contributing to illegal activities in the park such as prostitution, drug sales, sex, and public urination and defecation.

Responding to a question, Martz said that there has been trash, vandalism, destruction of benches, lights and artwork (a sculpture) and fires in the gazebo since the park opened. Bailey asked if anyone knew anything about the Sunday group. McLeland asked any groups fed the homeless on

weekdays. Staff reported that there was another group that fed people at Heritage Square Park Mondays at noon.

President Mitchell said he did not feel that public parks were designed or equipped to provide a home for people who had no place to live. He said vandalism and litter diminish use of the parks by the general public. He said there were organizations who were attempting to address the needs of the homeless and indigent and provide them services. He said he felt it was the responsibility of those organizations to provide services, not the public park system. He suggested that representatives of the various groups present get permission to attend the Merchants Association Meeting to further discuss the issue and come up with some alternative solutions. Mitchell thanked the groups for attending the meeting and providing input.

McLeland requested clarification on how the groups should proceed in the future. Mitchell said the permit rule should apply to the church groups immediately. He suggested that if they wanted the fee waived, they contact the City Manager's Office.

2. **Discussion of Facility Rental Policy.** Staff reported that this item had been pulled from the agenda pending review by the Finance Department.

OTHER ITEMS

There was brief discussion on the following items:

- Mitchell referred board members to the Council Proceedings on the Arts and Crafts Center Lease Agreement. Bailey reported that she would be attending a neighborhood association meeting regarding use of the building at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, 11/10/99 at Evergreen Park.
- Mitchell referred board members to the Financial Report. There was brief discussion concerning several entries.
- Mitchell requested a report on the Summer of Discovery Program at the next board meeting. This was follow up to Jim Johnston's request from the October meeting.
- Staff reported on USD 259 athletic field rentals.
- Staff reported that the lights at Eastview and McAdams have been replaced and timers reset. The added that the footings at Eastview playground have also been taken care of.
- Bailey reported on a meeting with Dodge Edison staff and parents regarding participation in the Summer of Discovery Program. There appeared to be some miscommunication and staff clarified that registration for the program was on a weekly basis and that participants could register for as many or as few weeks as they wanted (depending on available openings).
- Robinson said he had received a call regarding removal of the "bird sanctuary" sign, removal of trees for a mountain bike trail and graffiti at West Cessna Park. Mitchell referred board members to pictures he took at the park that day. Staff commented that West Cessna was a "Wichita Wild Habitat" area and apparently the sign has been removed. Mitchell commented that mountain biking was also becoming popular at Oak Park. He asked if mountain biking was consistent with the Wichita Wild Habitat designation. Martz said no areas have been

designated for that activity in the “Rules and Regulations”. There was discussion concerning enforcement. Mitchell commented that there was also graffiti on the shelter and tables.

- Mitchell reported that the old war industry sewer that crosses Gypsum Creek upstream from Pawnee has been replaced with modern sewer and concrete encasement. He said part of the end of the old sewer needs to be cleaned up and plugged. He referred board members to a picture.
- McKinney reported that she attended a Park Use Task Force meeting where Community Police Officers reported they are having problems with prostitution and other illegal activities at Sim Park. She said one idea discussed was turning some of the more secluded paths at the park into mountain bike trails to encourage more public use. She said park staff will be meeting with Community Police Officers to further discuss the issue and report back to the Board.
- McLeland asked about the status of Meyers Greenhouse. Staff reported that the City would not be pursuing purchase of the property. Robinson inquired about Greiffinstein. Bailey reported that USD 259 will not make a decision until after completion of their facilities study.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 5:15 p.m.

M.S. Mitchell, President

ATTEST:

Maryann Crockett, Clerk